

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SY-05 A-01 OPR-02 MCT-02 ACDA-12
HA-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04 NSAE-00
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R 162133Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1312
INFO AMEMBASSY MEXICO
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 4792

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, PINT, GT
SUBJ: CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT LUCAS, AUGUST 14

REF: GUATEMALA 4766 NOTAL

SUMMARY. IN EXTENSIVE EXCHANGE WITH PRESIDENT LUCAS AUGUST 14, HE LEFT LITTLE DOUBT OF HIS DETERMINATION TO DEAL FIRMLY WITH DEMONSTRATORS AND STRIKERS WHILE HEWING TO LETTER OF LAW. HE PROFESSED SATISFACTION WITH RELATIONS WITH US, BUT SHOWED SHARP DISSATISFACTION WITH US ON ARMS TRANSFER POLICY; AND HE HAD WARM WORDS FOR NEW COSTA RICAN ADMINISTRATION. HE ALSO SHOWED CONCERN ABOUT DEFORESTATION OF THE PETEN. END SUMMARY.

1. I CALLED ON PRESIDENT AUGUST 14, ACCOMPANIED BY POLITICAL SECTION CHIEF, FOR GENERAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS, A PARTIAL ACCOUNT
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OF WHICH HAS BEEN SENT BY REFTEL. ASKED HOW HE THOUGHT THINGS WERE GOING AFTER SIX WEEKS IN OFFICE, LUCAS ANSWERED NONCOMMITALLY AT FIRST. THEN, WARMING TO HIS SUBJECT, HE LAUNCHED INTO A DEFENSE OF HIS ACTION TO DISBAND THE PROTEST DEMONSTRATION IN GUATEMALA CITY AUGUST 4. HE LEFT NO DOUBT THAT HE INTENDED TO END PERMISSIVENESS TOWARDS UNAUTHORIZED DEMONSTRATIONS AND ILLEGAL STRIKES WHICH HAD CHARACTERIZED THE LAUGERUD

GOVERNMENT. HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD "ENFORCE THE LAW." IF SOME CHOSE NOT TO WORK OR ATTEND CLASSES, THAT WAS THEIR BUSINESS; BUT GOVERNMENT, AS HE SAW IT, HAD AN OBLIGATION TO ENSURE THAT THEY DID NOT INTERFERE WITH THE "HUMAN RIGHTS" OF OTHERS TO WORK AND EDUCATION. COMPLAINING OF THE UNFAIRNESS OF IT ALL, HE NOTED THAT ONE STRIKE WAS CALLED BECAUSE OF HIS EFFORTS TO END BLATANT CORRUPTION AND FEATHERBEDDING IN CONACE, THE SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AGENCY. MOREOVER, A NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS LEADING PROTESTS -- HE MENTIONED CNT AND CETE (CIVIL SERVANTS) -- HAD NO LEGAL STATUS. (ACTUALLY CNT HAS LEGAL STATUS. HE MAY HAVE MEANT CNUS.) HE SAW HIS PROBLEMS WITH LABOR REACHING CRISIS POINT IN MONTHS AHEAD. (UNLIKE FONMIN CASTILLO VALDEZ, WITH WHOM I HAD SIMILAR EXCHANGE AUGUST 11, LUCAS DID NOT SAY HE WOULD REFUSE TO HAVE DEALINGS WITH THESE UNOFFICIAL GROUPS. HE WOULD TRY, HE SAID, TO HAVE A DIALOGUE WITH THEM, VEN THOUGH HE CONSIDERED THEIR AIMS TO BE POLITICAL.) LUCAS' REITERATION OF GOG REQUEST FOR TEAR GAS, WHICH HE RAISED IN THIS CONTEXT, IS COVERED IN REFTEL.

2. BUSINESS COMMUNITY ALSO CAME IN FOR HARSH WORDS. HE WAS PARTICULARLY CRITICAL OF THE GUATEMALA CITY BUS OWNERS WHOSE "BLINDNESS" LED THEM TO FIRE A NUMBER OF STRIKING DRIVERS JUST AS A SETTLEMENT OF THE ON-AGAIN OFF-AGAIN BUS STRIKE SEEMED WORKABLE. HE REVEALED HE HAD MET PRIVATELY WITH YOUNGER BUSINESSMEN AND FOUND AT LEAST SOME OF THEM MORE IN TUNE WITH THE TIMES THAN THEIR ELDERS. HE ALSO SHOWED DISGUST WITH

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BUSINESSMEN WHO ARE DISINCLINED, HE SAID, TO INVEST IN NEW CEMENT CAPACITY FOR FEAR OF HURTING NOVELLA INTERESTS.

3. AT ONE POINT HE TOUCHED ON RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES. HE AND THE PRESIDENTS OF MEXICO AND COSTA RICA WERE ALREADY IN TELEPHONE CONTACT. HE WAS ESPECIALLY PLEASED WITH THE CARAZO ADMINISTRATION WHICH, UNLIKE ITS PREDECESSOR, HAD "TIGHTENED CONTROLS" OVER THE ACTIVITIES OF THE RESIDENT SOVIET MISSION. HE BLAMED SOVIETS, TOGETHER WITH THE CUBANS, FOR MUCH OF THE CURRENT CLIMATE OF AGITATION IN GUATEMALA. HE REMARKED THAT THE REMOVAL OF MELGAR HAD CAUSED POSTPONEMENT OF HIS PLANS TO VISIT HONDURAS, BUT HE HOPED TO MAKE THE TRIP SOON. A PLANNED VISIT TO EL SALVADOR WOULD COME AFTERWARD SINCE HE DID NOT WISH TO FEED SUSPICIONS THAT HE MIGHT BE BETTER DISPOSED TOWARDS THAT NEIGHBOR BECAUSE OF HIS MILITARY STUDIES THERE IN THE 1960'S. HE WOULD NOT BE GOING TO NICA-RAGUA, BOTH BECAUSE OF THE PRECARIOUS SITUATION THERE AND LEST A VISIT BE INTERPRETED AS SUPPORT FOR SOMOZA.

4. ALTHOUGH GIVEN SEVERAL OPENINGS, THE PRESIDENT SAID LITTLE ABOUT ECONOMIC MATTERS. HE DID, HOWEVER, EXPRESS CONSIDERABLE CONCERN OVER THE PACE OF DEFORESTATION IN THE PETEN. "THE

CAMPESINO FOLLOWS THE BULLDOZER," HE SAID, EXPLAINING THAT WHEREVER A ROAD IS PUT THROUGH THE RAINFOREST, SQUATTERS QUICKLY MOVE IN TO SLASH AND BURN FOR CORNFIELDS. THE LESSON HE DREW FROM THIS WAS THE NEED TO PUT LIMITS ON ROAD CONSTRUCTION IN THE AREA, POSSIBLY EVEN TO KEEP THE NORTHERN PETEN ROADLESS AND LOOK FURTHER INTO THE IDEA OF SELECTIVE LOGGING, USING HELICOPTERS. I NOTED OUR PEACE CORPS GROUP'S EMPHASIS ON REFORESTATION HERE.

5. COMMENT. THE PRESIDENT WAS FRIENDLY BUT OFFERED FEW SURPRISES. CONVERSATION DID CONFIRM, IF CONFIRMATION WERE NECESSARY, HIS DETERMINATION TO ASSERT HIS AUTHORITY IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGES FROM AN URBAN LABOR MOVEMENT SHOWING INCREASING SIGNS OF COMBATIVENESS. RESENTMENT OF OUR ARMS
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POLICY (REFTEL) PROMISES TO BE A CONTINUING LUCAS THEME. HIS REMARKS ON THE PETEN REVEAL A WELCOME APPRECIATION, WHICH HAS POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR ATTITUDES ON POPULATION CONTROL AND AGRICULTURAL POLICY GENERALLY, THAT THE SPARSELY SETTLED FAR NORTH IS NOT A PANACEA FOR GUATEMALA'S LAND PROBLEMS.
BOSTER

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NNN

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